

Vol 1

No 5

SOCIALIST APPEAL

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER-1935

EDITORIALS:

The N.E.C. Has Shown Its Colors
William Green Breaks Labor Unity
A Communist "Victory"

Communists for Free Speech

NOTES ON THE "PEACE"

- Haim Kantorovitch

MILITANCY COMES OF AGE IN THE YPSL

- Melos Most

THE YIPSEL CONVENTION

- Ernest Erber

THE "WORKERS' AMENDMENT"

- Albert Goldman

= THE SOCIALIST APPEAL =

Published every month by the APPEAL PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
4452 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

Vol. I

August-September, 1935

No. 5

NOTES OF THE MONTH

N.E.C. HAS SHOWN ITS COLORS;

THE LEFT WING MUST NOW SHOW ITS!

The victory of the New York old guard and of the right wing of the Socialist party throughout the country at the meeting of the National Executive Committee held in New York on July 13-14, was a decisive one.

But it is a mistake of the first magnitude to consider the left wing as having been smashed to pieces without any hope of consolidating itself for the future and becoming much stronger than it ever was.

The attitude of all genuine left wingers of the party, of all revolutionary Marxists must be:

AS REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS WE ACCEPT THE DISCIPLINE OF THE PARTY; BUT AS REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER OUR PRINCIPLES AND WE SHALL ORGANIZE TO STRUGGLE FOR VICTORY OVER A RIGHT WING THAT HAS NO VISION FOR THE FUTURE OUTSIDE OF DRAGGING ALONG ON THE COAT TAILS OF A DECAYING CAPITALIST DEMOCRACY.

Capitulation of N.E.C. Does
Not Give Party a Chance
to Go Forward.

One of the characteristics of a Marxist is to face reality. No illusions, no exaggerations. Consequently we must reject completely the opinion of Comrade Norman Thomas that the agreement between the New York old guard and the majority of the N E C "gives the party a chance to go forward with new energy and new devotion to constructive work." We stand on the fundamental basis that the party can not grow and become a factor in the American labor movement under the leadership of the right wing. It may achieve apparent successes by an alliance with the upper layers of the American Federation of Labor bureaucracy; it may achieve some electoral victories by concealing whatever socialism it adheres to. But those victories will be temporary and extremely ephemeral. They will be the "victories" of the Socialist and Communist parties of Germany before Hitler smashed them without any resistance on their part.

Victory for us means the organization and the training of the working class for a final assault upon capitalist rule and the conquest of power by the workers under the leadership of the revolutionary Socialist party. That can be achieved only by revolutionary Marxists and not by

cringing reformists.

Not An Agreement But a Surrender

Not much need be said with reference to the agreement itself. It is not an agreement; it is not a compromise. Those two words generally indicate that in a controversy both sides gain and lose some parts of their demands. Not so in this case. It is a capitulation. The majority of the NEC accepted the terms of the New York old guard. That is the only correct way to characterize the "agreement". Graciously and magnanimously does Algernon Lee declare, on behalf of the right wing, that what the N. E. C. did cannot be considered a victory or a defeat for any side. Pitifully do some vague and peaceful "militants" point to the fact that the old guard agreed to take back the Yipsels as an indication that something was won for the Militants. The fact is that the New York old guard remains in power; it has been given the express right to criticize the Declaration of Principles while the same right was not granted to the opponents of the Declaration from the left; above all, it has been furnished with one of the most grotesque definitions of communism which places in its hands the power to expel any members and to refuse admittance to any one who does not agree with the reformist conception of socialism.

The only thing the old guard was what it did not ask for specifically, namely an order to stop publication of the Socialist Call. The old guard undoubtedly expects to get that later.

Definition of Communism Indica-

tion of Low Intellectual Level

The definition of communism as formulated in the agreement will go down in history as the example of the lowest intellectual level reached by any group in the socialist movement anywhere in the world. No lower depths of stupidity can be reached. The left wingers can possibly console themselves with the idea that the definition is so utterly stupid that it is meaningless and consequently cannot be used as a basis for expelling anyone. Of course it would be foolish to rely upon the meaninglessness of the definition because that very meaninglessness will be utilized by the right wingers to expel revolutionists.

According to the majority of the N E C any one is a communist who advocates or practices four things: 1) violent insurrection; 2) dictatorship or abandonment of democracy either as a fact within the party or as an ideal method of achieving Socialism; 3) subjection of the party to a bureaucratic mechanical discipline from abroad such as that imposed by the Third International; 4) the use of deceitful or underground tactics even as a means to a worthy end.

It does not appear whether one has to advocate or practice all of the conditions enumerated above or any one of them. If all, then not even a member of the Communist party could be excluded from membership in our party. If on the other hand, as is surely the case, any one of the conditions is sufficient to keep one out of the party then there is very slim possibility that any one who disagrees in the least

with the reactionary right wing will be permitted to remain in or to join the party. This and this alone explains the reason why the old guard is so satisfied with the "agreement".

Let us subject the definition to a short analysis. In the first place it must be recognized that there are actually fourteen conditions instead of four, any one of which is sufficient to stamp one as a communist. Either advocacy or practice of any one of these ideas or acts enumerated makes one a communist. Consequently the ideas and acts enumerated must be multiplied by two. And to divide them in detail they are as follows: 1) violent insurrection; 2) dictatorship; 3) abandonment of democracy as a fact within the party; 4) abandonment of democracy as an ideal method of achieving socialism; 5) same as 3 in original; 6) use of deceitful tactics even as a means to a worthy end; 7) use of underground tactics even as a means to a worthy end. Difficult indeed would it be to discover an opponent who would not violate one of the fourteen conditions.

Infantile Ideas of Definition

As for the ideas contained in the definition they are so infantile as to make an analysis almost impossible. The definition mentions practice of violent insurrection. Where and when did the highly intelligent members of the NEC voting for the definition find any member of the Socialist party practice violent insurrection? And by the way, perhaps the theoreticians who framed the definition would explain to ordinary mortals what the difference is between vio-

lent and non-violent insurrection?

That part of the definition dealing with the abandonment of democracy as a fact within the party is applicable to only two categories of persons: one, the Stalinists, and, two, the old guard. Right wing socialists in control of the party have never distinguished themselves for their devotion to democratic procedure within the party. And the old guard members of New York must have smiled cynically when reading this part of the agreement. And as far as abandoning democracy as an ideal method of achieving Socialism is concerned, since we do not live in an ideal capitalist world the question of an ideal method to change an ideal world is really of no vital interest except as the formulation of such an idea reflects upon the intelligence of the formulators.

The idea contained in the fourth clause of the definition easily takes the prize for imbecility. To attempt to define a political current in the working class movement by a moral judgment involving deceit or underground tactics is the height of something or other. That part of the definition does not specify whether the end for which the deceitful or underground tactics are to be used is a political end. Under that clause of the definition anyone applying for membership could and should be examined with reference to his moral and ethical concepts involving all human conduct.

To take the above characterization of communism seriously as a political characterization

would be almost as stupid as the characterization itself. But to ignore it because of its ridiculousness would be wrong for two reasons. One, because every intelligent member of the party, even though he may not agree with the left wing, must blush with shame at the low intellectual level of the leadership of the party as indicated by the definition. And the second and more important reason, as indicated above, because the definition furnishes the right wing with the necessary excuse for the extirpation of all revolutionary sentiments.

IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT NO REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST WORTH HIS SALT WILL FOR A MOMENT AGREE TO SURRENDER HIS PRINCIPLES BECAUSE THE N E C ADOPTS AN ABSURD DEFINITION OF COMMUNISM WHICH CONCEIVABLY MIGHT BE USED TO APPLY TO A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST.

A revolutionary socialist will enter into practical compromises depending upon the strength of the movement he represents, but he must not compromise on principle.

N E C Has no Authority to Lay Down Fundamental Principles

Here it must be stated clearly that the NEC usurped its authority. It had absolutely no right to formulate a fundamental principle for the party. That is the duty and privilege of a convention of the party and not of the N E C. The Detroit Convention adopted a declaration of principles. Every member of the party became obligated to be guided by that declaration and if he did not agree with it he had the right to criticize it and attempt

to change it at the next convention. The NEC was elected to carry on the work of the party in accordance with the principles laid down in the declaration. The members of the N E C have no more authority to change the fundamental principles of the party as formulated by a convention than any rank and file member.

If the declaration of principles needed clarification and definition, the N E C had only a limited right to make such clarification and definition. But it could not alter any of the provisions of the declaration by the subterfuge of definition or clarification. It could not add anything of fundamental importance to that declaration. And the definition of communism attempts to add, even if it does not do so clearly, a fundamental principle which is not included in the declaration.

Under the definition of communism as formulated by the majority of the NEC a member of the party is not permitted to advocate the idea of "dictatorship". The word "dictatorship" is not mentioned in the declaration of principles but it is nevertheless clearly implied as applicable under certain conditions. Neither the declaration nor any resolution prohibited the advocacy of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was not within the power of the N E C to do anything which the Detroit convention would have frowned upon.

Dictatorship of Proletariat is
Democracy for the Workers

Revolutionary socialists believe that between capitalist

society and socialist society there will be a period when the proletariat supported by the majority of the middle class will control the state apparatus. This will constitute the transition stage in the progress of mankind towards a classless society. During that period the working class under the leadership of a revolutionary Marxist party will take over all the means of production and in general do everything necessary to build the structure of a world socialist society. The working class will not hesitate to suppress all efforts of the expropriated capitalists to regain their power. The working class, organized in such forms as will be best adapted for the task of creating a new society, will then have real democracy.

Revolutionary socialists use the term "workers' democracy" or the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" (especially in Europe) or "workers' government" to designate that transition stage.

It is absolutely out of the question for a revolutionary Marxist to surrender his belief in the necessity of a transitional stage as described in very broad outlines in the preceding paragraphs. That must be repeated and insisted upon frankly and determinedly.

Should any one be so naive as to raise the question of discipline, the answer is short and decisive that discipline applies to actions and not to beliefs in fundamental principles.

What Is Necessary for the Future

The revolutionary elements within the party cannot of course accept the action of the N E C at its last meeting as final. Contrary to the hopes of the small revolutionary groups outside of the party, the revolutionary elements will not desert the Socialist party but will entrench themselves more firmly and wage an organized struggle against the majority of the N E C.

Not to antagonize the majority of the NEC the militants confined the struggle to New York and would not broaden the struggle on a national scale. Meanwhile the old guard did carry the fight outside of New York and obtained substantial support from people all over the country. The old guard although never capable of showing aggressiveness against the capitalist class showed a good deal of it against the militants and in the end that was an important factor. The majority of the N E C acted as it did because it is composed of people who are essentially with the old guard in principle and because the militants failed to put up a principles struggle throughout the country. The first reason of course, is decisive, and the second subsidiary

Recognizing this mistake, it is not at all difficult to lay out a program for the mobilization of the revolutionary elements of the party for a struggle to make of the Socialist party a revolutionary instrument. We must organize the revolutionary elements on a national scale; we must formulate a program of revolutionary principles; we must propose activities for the party which will bring the party into contact with the labor movement

and not only with the bureaucracy of that movement; we must educate the left wing and the members in general in the principles of revolutionary socialism.

We must from now on wage a principles fight so that we shall know who can be counted as for us and who against us. This does not mean to follow a sectarian line. We shall make blocs with other elements of the party when it will be necessary but never at the expense of principle.

An organized left wing fighting to make the Socialist party into an instrument for revolution will be the most valuable single factor in the development of the revolutionary movement in this country.

WILLIAM GREEN BREAKS TRADE UNION UNITY

There is no principle to which the working class must cling more tenaciously and which revolutionary socialists in particular must fight for more ardently than the unity of the working class in the trade unions. On the political field it is sometimes necessary to split because of differences on fundamental principles. On the political field it is necessary at times to be exclusive. But as far as trade unionism is concerned, all attempts to split the working class because of differences in political or economic beliefs is absolutely destructive to the interests of the working masses. They who do anything to create division amongst the workers in the arena of trade unionism, no matter what their motives are, must be fought most vigorously.

It matters not from where the threat to trade union unity comes, from right or left. It must be fought. When the Communists followed their splitting policy of dual unionism their success was so insignificant as not to constitute a menace. Fortunately for the workers it was only in one or two industries where the Communists succeeded in building up a functioning union. In all other industries their unions had imposing names with a few Communist functionaries as members.

The miserable failure of the Communist dual union policy led them ultimately to surrender such an insane tactic and once more they are sending their followers into the regular unions. Their policy is still far from a correct one; it is still essentially disruptive. But they have at least formally given up their dual union policy and that is some advance.

Now comes William Green, arch-reactionary, and issues a ukase to the effect that all A F of L unions must expel the Communists or run the risk of having their charters revoked. Green's order came immediately after the Communist Fur Workers' Industrial Union had decided to liquidate itself and have its members join the International Fur Workers' Union, affiliated with the A F of L. In effect Green said that the majority of the organized fur workers cannot join the A F of L. This is splitting with a vengeance.

No one acquainted with Communist tactics in the trade unions can have the least sympathy with them. A readiness to slander

everyone who disagrees with them a vicious desire to take advantage of every difficulty in the course of the actual work for the purpose of stirring up hatred against even the most honest leadership, a willingness to unite with the most dishonest elements of the union in order to gain some advantage for themselves, - all these characterize the work of the Communists in the unions.

But these characteristics do not justify expulsion of the Communists as a group. If any one Communist is to be expelled it must be done for his disruptive work, for some flagrant breach of union discipline, in other words for the same reasons that any one who is not a Communist should be expelled. Under no circumstances should Communists as such be expelled.

The attitude of Green, Woll and other reactionaries of the AF of L is dangerous to the unity of the working class. Members of the Socialist party active in the trade unions must fight every action tending to destroy the unity of the workers on the trade union field.

"VICTORY" FOR THE COMMUNISTS

Revolutionary Marxists following the lead of Leon Trotsky, arch-counterrevolutionist, have been contending that to guard the existence of the Soviet Union in the long run it is necessary to extend the proletarian revolution to the most advanced capitalist countries. The Communists following the leadership of Stalin have assumed the attitude that it is sufficient for the Soviet Union to make alliances

with imperialist countries and to organize the "friends" of the Soviet Union to shake a weak finger at the hostile capitalists.

It was left for the Communist party of the U. S. A. to show in practice that Stalin, as always, is correct.

An admiral of the United States navy, Yates Stirling Jr. by name, having literary and political ambitions, through the instrumentality of the Hearst press, let the whole world into a dark secret, namely that the Rear Admiral and many others like him look with great suspicion upon the Soviet Union and would be inclined to help Hitler in any war against the country of the Russian workers. Those of us who are slightly acquainted with the writings of Marx and Lenin always assumed that officers of high command in the armed forces of the imperialist countries would almost surely be against the proletarian revolution and against the land of the proletarian revolution.

Without even reading any articles wherein these officers, in all probability through their ghost writers, let the world know what they are thinking about, Marxists asserted that those in the lead of capitalist armies were enemies of the working class and consequently enemies of the Soviet Union. It remained for the Communists to raise a howl of surprise when Admiral Yates put into writing his thoughts and the thoughts of his fellow officers.

Either the Marxists were wrong in their assumption or the Communists are not Marxists!

Now of course as everyone knows in the Communist creed it is stated clearly that words are not enough; that action is necessary and vital. And to be sure the Admiral's words afforded a splendid issue upon which to mobilize the working class. It was enough to point a surprised finger at the naval officer and bring before the working masses the conclusive evidence that amongst the high officers of the armed forces there is anti-Soviet sentiment; the particular officer must be punished so as to teach other officers a needed lesson to keep their anti-Soviet sentiments to themselves.

A campaign was organized and on the front page of the Daily Worker every day for about a month or so the working class was called upon -- to send telegrams asking for the removal of the frank Rear Admiral.

We do not know how many telegrams were actually sent and how much profit the telegraph companies made on the campaign. A great number must have been sent to induce Secretary of the Navy Swanson to send a letter to Stirling containing a polite reprimand -- not for being hostile to the Soviet Union, but for making public that hostility. Of course the Communists would be satisfied with nothing short of the Rear Admiral's removal; but the number of telegrams, alas, was not sufficient.

Now then the great lesson! To assure the effective defense of the Soviet Union it is necessary to hire a detective agency to ferret out the true sentiments of the high command, to swamp the officials in charge with tele-

grams for the removal of the anti-Soviet officers of the army and the navy.

And, by the way, did not the chief bureaucrats of the Communist party of France advocate the removal of the fascist officers of the French army to assure the possibility of the French army being loyal to the Franco-Soviet alliance?

Talk to me not of world revolution. Tell me something about bad officers and about telegrams to remove them and the Soviet Union will be safe!

- - - - -

COMMUNISTS FAVOR FREE SPEECH

An item appeared in the capitalist press of Chicago. Our eyes popped out! It was unbelievable, a vicious slander of the kept press! It dealt with the fight of the priest-politician, the great Coughlin, to obtain Soldier's Field for the purpose of peddling his hokum to bewildered men and women who are gullible enough to believe that what the great Father says is of some benefit to them. And it also went on to relate how the legal light of the Communist party came in on an intervening petition on behalf of the Communist party praying that Coughlin be allowed to use the meeting place.

Now, alas, those who know the gyrations the Communist party is capable of making should be surprised at nothing the leaders of the C. P. bring forth from their fertile and feverish brains. But it was a little too much to expect that one should without hesitation believe the report in

the capitalist press that the Communists were championing the cause of Coughlin. Not until the Daily Worker carried the same news was it possible to accept the truth of the story.

It has been a cardinal principle with all revolutionary Marxists that the revolutionary working class does not fight for freedom in the abstract, for freedom for all classes and all groups in society. A liberal democrat belonging to the American Civil Liberties Union will come out in favor of freedom of speech, of press, of assembly not only for workingclass groups but for fascists. But for a Marxian revolutionist, the class struggle is the dominant factor in our social system and we must look at all things including the bourgeois freedoms from the point of view of that struggle. We fight for freedom for the working class because we are convinced that to achieve freedom for that class is to assure freedom for all of society. Freedom for the fascists means slavery for the working class and for everyone else.

We do not mean to indicate that Coughlin is a fascist. It is enough to say that he has a definite anti-working class bias. True, he cannot afford at the present time to make his hostility to radical working class philosophies his main stock in trade. At that he does not try to conceal his hatred for communism and socialism; to gain the confidence of his gullible followers he must at present stress his opposition to the "international bankers". It is certainly the duty of every radical worker and socialist or communist sym-

pathizer to disillusion Coughlin's followers. And we are not at all in duty bound to see that Coughlin is granted the right to confuse, bewilder and deceive the masses.

Not that any radical working class group claiming to base itself on Marxian principles should carry on a campaign for the purpose of preventing Coughlin from obtaining a permit. Were he definitely a fascist this would be a correct tactic but since he is not we need not go to the extreme of trying to prevent his holding a meeting. To fight for the right of free speech for Coughlin is to forget that revolutionary Marxists do not look upon free speech as an abstraction applicable under all circumstances but as an aid in the struggle for a socialist society. We must be for free speech for every working class organization regardless of our disagreement with such an organization simply because it is a working class organization and not because we look upon free speech as a fetish.

More and more does it become clear that the Communists are ready to subordinate considerations of principle to "clever" maneuvers. Obviously there are three reasons for the actions of the Chicago Communists in petitioning the court to grant Coughlin the right to use Soldiers' Field. One is the little publicity that would accrue to the Communist party and the Communists "pay a great deal of attention to publicity in the capitalist press. A second reason is to show that they believe in real democracy, thinking thus to gain the support of liberal elo-

ments. The third and most important reason is their hope to be able to get Soldiers' Field if the Reverend Father is granted the right to speak there.

We do not know whether the cardinals in New York favored this high strategy but it would not surprise us in the least. When once one leaves the track of revolutionary Marxism in a fundamental principle such as the necessity for international revolution, there is no telling where one will land. And if the Chicago small fry adopted the tactic described above on their own initiative it is evidence of the fact that a system which prevents freedom of criticism except by

the one higher up is bound to result in a complete ignorance of revolutionary Marxism.

- - - - -

WHICH CRISIS DID YOU SAY?

Shortly after the last meeting of the National Committee of the Socialist party, the Chicago local of the Workers Party announced a mass meeting to discuss "the crisis in the Socialist party". The "masses" turned out to the number of fourteen, practically all members of the W.P. We have not been able to find out whether the W P members, realistic Marxists that they claim they are, changed the title to "The Crisis in the Workers Party."

- - - - -

NOTES ON THE "PEACE AGREEMENT" BETWEEN THE N.E.C.

AND THE NEW YORK STATE COMMITTEE

By Haim Kantorovitch

1) The "peace treaty solemnly entered into" by the N. E. C. of the Socialist party of America and the nine members (a majority) of the New York State Committee of the Socialist party is hailed all over the country as the great victory of the right wing. Not wishing to fool ourselves, we readily admit that it is a great victory for the right wing. We deny however that it is a defeat for the left wing. It is a defeat for the party and its N.E.C. Henceforth, the N. E. C. of the party stands out as a group of blind and scared people that can be coerced into anything. The N.E.C. does not want to lead the party. It would rather let the party drift on the theory that maybe it will reach some shore,

and maybe not.

2) The N. E. C. was not called upon to decide matters of program and principles. The N.E.C. has no jurisdiction in such matters; it has no right to change the party program and principles; this can be done only by a national convention or a national referendum. What the N.E.C. had to decide was this: Can an organic part of the party violate the constitution of the party, disregard all rules of inner party democracy, conduct an open fight in its own and the capitalist press against everything that the party stands for, declare publicly that "the S P was captured by shady personalities with no records" (that was in a

full page headline in an article by the infamous Louis Hendin, in the Jewish Daily Forward), disregard all decisions of the N.E.C. and still not only remain a part of the party, but also dictate its will to the N.E.C.

The N.E.C. in fact decided that such things are permissible, that any part of the party may do it, provided it can threaten to starve out the N.E.C. financially and split the party.

3) The N.E.C. had before it a report of its Committee on Inquiry and Mediation. The New Leader christened it the "smell committee" and called on the N.E.C. to stop its "gangster methods". The report of the committee corroborates all the charges of the Militants, but the N.E.C. entirely ignored the report of its own committee and acted solely on the purely practical (if practical) consideration that, if "we" don't submit, "they" will split the party. Did the N.E.C. realize what a dangerous precedent it was creating?

4) The fight in New York as it is indeed all over the country, is between the "militants" and the "old guard". The N.E.C. wanted to bring peace between the two warring factions. Its way of doing it was really very original. It held a peace conference with one faction (old guard) and did not even ask the other faction to participate in the conference, neither were they asked to sign the peace agreement. The militant members of the N.E.C. had voted against the peace agreement. The result is that we have peace now between the N.E.C. and the New York State Committee, but not between the

"militants" and the "old guard" certainly not between the "right" and "left" wings of the party.

5) If the old guard in New York will really keep its promises and stick to the peace agreement, it will be of a great advantage to the militants. The vast amount of time, energy and money that had to be sacrificed in this purely organizational fight will now be turned to the much more profitable task of building up in N.Y. as well as nationally a well organized left wing, based on a definite left wing program. In the long run it is of greater importance than an organizational victory in N.Y. This must not however be interpreted to mean that the fight for party control, locally as well as nationally, is not important. It certainly is. Both tasks, the fight for organizational control and the organization of the left wing, must go hand in hand, they are the two sides of the same medal.

6) The only real advantage of this strange peace is that it will help the militants extirpate themselves from a very unnatural alliance into which they were forced by objective conditions since the Detroit convention. To scare the timid souls in the party, the old guard raised the cry that the N.E.C. was "left"; it always referred to it as the "militant" N.E.C. We always knew of course that the present N.E.C. is, in its majority, neither left nor militant, none of us was so blind as to think that Dan Hoan, or Hoopes, or Graham are left wingers. Conditions in the party were such, however, that the militants had to claim the N.E.C. as their own, stand behind it,

fight for it, defend all its mistakes and incongruities, bearing responsibility for it -- and all the time knowing that we are fighting a battle which is not ours, and that this unnatural alliance puts us in a false and often ridiculous position. The reason for this, of course, was that the N.E.C. had been elected on a program which was considered to the left of the party's prev-

ious program and the N.E.C. was identified with the new program. At last this unnatural alliance is broken. The majority of the N.E.C. made its stand clear. Now we have no more obligations to the N. E. C. than Louis Waldman has. The way is clear for a left wing now; let us waste no time and take up the difficult task at once. It will be hard work, but it will pay in the end.

- - - - -

MILITANCY COMES OF AGE IN THE YOUNG PEOPLES SOCIALIST LEAGUE

By Melos Most

"Left Tendency Dominates Socialist Youth Congress" was the headline used in the Socialist Call to describe the Pittsburgh convention of the Young People's Socialist League. This was surprising to many. Most socialists had considered the Y P S L as a left Socialist organization for many years; those who knew better still wondered why a change in control should be so candidly headlined.

The answer to both lies in the history of the League.

In its 1933 convention at Reading the YPSL elected an administration of known Militant sympathies and organizational ability. But at Reading, much as at Detroit, the issues were not clearly defined. The new officers, Dancis and MacDowell, ran the League on the basis of a confused type of "left" philosophy rampant in - and peculiar to - the American Socialist movement. Their two years in office revealed the following:

1. Despite the fact that they regarded both themselves and the membership as left wing, they considered the organization as something apart from its members, and did not want it to be "left" as such within the movement.

When a group of left wing Socialist youth movements affiliated to the Socialist Youth International held an informal conference to discuss their problems, one would have expected the YPSL administration here to be at least sympathetic. Instead, they even went so far as to send A COMMUNIQUE TO THE SYI EXPRESSING THEIR DISAPPROVAL OF THE CONFAB.

When Local Bridgeport of the Socialist party expelled the YPSL of that city - two circles naive enough to believe that one should sing the Internationale at socialist meetings - did the Yipsel NEC give them the encouragement they so badly needed at the time? Far from it; to show that it was "absolutely fair" the N.E.C SUSPENDED THE BRIDGEPORT YPSL FOR

HAVING VIOLATED SOME TECHNICALITY IN ITS DIFFICULTIES WITH THE PARTY.

And finally, when the New York League was "locked out" for its courageous stand in defense of the movement's national integrity Dancis and MacDowell fought - this time with the entire N E C against them - to qualify the League's support of its New York section. In the face of the New York party's unscrupulous tactics they opposed a statement that the city League had acted in accord with Socialist law and ethics. In the face of an Old Guard that has fought since Eighteen-Something-Or-Other against a party-controlled press - and is doing so even now in New Jersey - but which came out in defense of the sanctity of party organs when it hit home, Dancis claimed that the New York League had a right to criticize but NOT TO WITHDRAW SUPPORT FROM THE NEW LEADER, a claim the Old Guard did not even make. And when the membership of the New York League was informed and allowed to express its feelings on what was going on in the N E C. MacDowell - who has never protested about the party's making concessions to its strong local sections - was so indignant that membership pressure had been brought to bear that he wanted to resign as national chairman.

2. Elected by a leftward-groping membership in search of leadership, they regarded this groping and search as no particular concern of the administration.

Very little effort was made to give the League a real training in the "revolutionary Socialism" that both leaders and rank-and-

file so fondly talked about. The result was indescribable ideological confusion, in which some elements found their way out of the League and very few found their way in.

Even the "left" moves that were made, were made purely as organizational, never as educational steps. The problem of the obstructionist right wing elements in New York (now in the Young Socialist Alliance) was dealt with only in private communications to the city executive secretary. The McLevy case was to be handled simply by having the top leadership lodge charges against him with the Party N E C. Questions such as these were never made the basis for educational drives among the members, to teach them to understand for themselves the issues involved.

3. They had no confidence in Militant Socialism as a means of building the movement. Whatever they believed of left wing theory they regarded it as fit for internal consumption only.

They adopted the attitude that, as Kantorovitch so aptly put it, "we may discuss capitalism but we must not go into Socialism". The "Challenge", our official organ, had been the perfect centrist paper. In the name of being a "propaganda organ" it has withheld from the outside leftward-moving masses of youth precisely the information they want most and ask first about the Socialist youth movement. It has not even dealt with a question like Communism in its news columns, a question which does, and should, arouse the curiosity of every newcomer to the radical movement.

The philosophy underlying this has been expressed by Dancis in an article in the Young Socialist Review: "How can we expect workers and farmers to fight for Socialism when they won't vote for our program and candidates?" His solution to this all-too-easily posed question was that our emphasis should be almost solely on organization as opposed to theory.

But Dancis forgot that - unlike the early days of the social democratic movements in Europe when the workers had nowhere else to turn - workers and farmers, particularly young workers and farmers, may not want to follow a movement unless they know where they are following it to.

As a result the League has not been in a position to recruit properly among the awakened youth, nor to prevent them from going Communist or even fascist. It has made no showing to speak of against the Young Communist League, all rationalizations to the contrary notwithstanding.

4. The administration did not apply its Militant principles organizationally, just as it did not apply them to anything else. League policy was extremely unventuresome.

Militancy does not only involve a theoretical outlook, it must also mean an organization that is alive and kicking. Dancis was a crack organizational routine man, but he went no further than that.

The League did not expand in scope, reorganize its weak features, conduct campaigns that involved the membership, or in-

crease its morale by internal propaganda. There was little real leadership. The one drive that was undertaken, a national membership drive, was inadequately pushed. Financial policy was characterized by conservative cautiousness.

Not all of this can be blamed on actual policy, but a good deal of it can.

The fact remains that, with Dancis doing enough work for three people in the national office, THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE LEAGUE DECREASED BY ALMOST 25%. Certainly the convention, which should be a test of strength, was poorly organized.

All of this can be put very neatly - in retrospect. The members of the Young People's Socialist League, whether vaguely or articulately, do realize these things, but they have only come to realize them very recently. Even in the New York League, which has been much more self-consciously Militant, we have ourselves been guilty of not a few of the mistakes listed above.

The realization of past mistakes had been growing for the past year. But it came to the surface with a bang after the Party N E C meeting, in New York the week before the convention, when the NEC's policy of "Militancy in abstract" reached its logical climax: capitulation.

The delegates at Pittsburgh did not want to repeat the mistake of the Party at Detroit.

First, they wanted a Militant leadership which would make no bones about taking a position on

the questions confronting the movement.

Was this because they wanted a "factional administration" which would insure mechanical majority domination within the League? Emphatically not; the election of the new N E C has shown that every effort will be made to insure minority viewpoints of representation.

But the Party NEC proved that by a policy of "not taking sides" a body of honest Socialists was brought to a point where it could tolerate and compromise with elements which have violated the integrity of the movement.

The delegates at Pittsburgh realized that AN ADMINISTRATION WHICH DOES NOT ACT ON THE BASIS OF PRINCIPLES WILL ACT ON THE BASIS OF OPPORTUNISM AND POLITICAL TRADING.

Second, they wanted a left wing organization which would be left wing AS an organization.

Was this to make the League an organization which would help build the left wing in the movement as a whole? Partially, but that was not uppermost in the minds of the delegates.

With the Party NEC meeting had come the first full realization that the Party was not under a

really left wing leadership, and might not be even after the Party's next convention.

These young people represented the most active elements in the movement, those who have been out "organizing, educating, and propagandizing" for Socialism. They, more than other Socialists, have come in contact with the masses that are becoming radicalized, particularly the youth, among whom the Communist influence and the fascist danger are greatest, and they have come to understand that Socialism without Militant theory and policy to back it is sterile.

They wanted a left wing organization not simply to build the left wing in the Socialist movement, but TO BUILD THE MOVEMENT ITSELF, AND DESTROY THE EXTERNAL ENEMIES OF THE MOVEMENT.

Individual resolutions, individual personalities, were subordinated to this great purpose. The YPSL has elected a left wing leadership as a left wing leadership. It has chosen to be a left wing organization and to be left wing as an organization.

That is why we could openly, in fact proudly, say, to the outside workers, as well as to our comrades: "Left Tendency Dominates Socialist Youth Congress."

Will you help us

graduate from mimeo
to print?

7

SUBSCRIBE AT ONCE!
50¢ for six issues.

GET OTHERS TO SUBSCRIBE!
\$1.00 for twelve issues.

SOCIALIST APPEAL, 4452 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

THE YIPSEL CONVENTION

By Ernest Erber

The Eighth National Convention of the Young People's Socialist League will be remembered less for what it accomplished than for what it failed to do.

It is true that much of the failure is due to the technical arrangements, chiefly the lack of time. The technical arrangements, however, were themselves a reflection of the political condition of the League. I do not here mean the political view of those who planned the convention. I mean the prevalent attitude of the majority of the most active and leading comrades.

Before the League can feel prepared adequately to fulfill the tasks before it, it must give its members a much more intensive education in Revolutionary Socialism than they have had until now. It must train the membership to understand and help develop an organizational structure more suited for the type of work the League must carry on, and must plan campaigns that will involve the whole membership in activity and through such activity aid the political and organizational development of the League. The work of advancing the League on these lines should have begun with a pre-convention discussion of these problems lasting at least three months. The basis of such discussion should have been supplied by the NEC in the form of an analysis of the work of the League since the last convention and a program, both theoretical and organizational, submitted as the basis of activity

for the next two years.

Without such preparation the convention seemed of little importance to the membership. They looked upon it as necessary to fulfill the obligations of the constitution which called for a convention every second year. A large number seemed to have come to meet old friends or merely for a week-end vacation. That this attitude was not more prevalent, in view of the lack of preparation for the convention, speaks well for the bulk of our membership. This lack of preparation was also responsible for the vast majority of the delegates coming to the convention without any knowledge of what the important questions to be decided were. Most of them received such information when it was whispered to them upon their arrival that some group is preparing to have the convention adopt some proposal or other. This made it difficult for any group to organize a caucus on important issues. As a result caucuses were organized on vague tendencies and on personalities.

The first session, held on the morning of the 20th, was taken up with routine matters, mostly with the election of eight or nine committees. So many of the delegates were involved in committee work that it was impossible to hold committee meetings during sessions. The committees therefore had barely time to organize their work before the afternoon session began. The afternoon session lasted until

after 6 pm. The delegates hastily ate and scattered to the different caucuses, feeling that it was there that a frank discussion of the important problems they were interested in would take place. This resulted in having important committees meet hastily before the Sunday morning session to prepare their reports. One can well imagine the report of a resolutions committee meeting under these circumstances and preparing a Statement of Principles, resolutions on the International Situation, the Soviet Union, the Road to Power, Fascism, as well as on a number of current questions such as the Herndon case. An organization that determines its political position and charts its course of action in this way cannot be considered prepared to face the tasks involved in winning the youth of the nation for Socialism.

To leave the preparation of committee reports to such a haphazard method is bad enough. Worse was the distinction this convention achieved in adorning without the adoption of a single resolution. And worst of all is the attitude of those "practical" comrades who cynically regard this as an achievement to be proud of. Here indeed is an example of near-sightedness mistaken for practicality. These "practical" people give adequate testimony to their political ignorance when they refer to the resolutions committee as the "hot-air" committee. Were it not for the high positions such comrades hold there would be no need of taking them seriously. The fact that they hold these positions is a good indication of the distance the membership must travel on the road of polit-

ical development.

The two matters that caused the most debate were a majority and minority report on the right of members to issue statements and periodicals referred to the convention by the NEC, and a change in the constitution to raise the age limit to 30 years. The apparent similarity of the minority and majority on the matter of statements confused many delegates. The discussion revolved around whether it was more democratic to limit discussion of inner-League affairs to official channels or to permit members the right of issuing material of their own. The adoption of the latter caused the minority of the delegates to initiate a referendum.

The discussion of the age limit proposal was veiled in all sorts of arguments that evaded the core of the matter. Despite this the majority of the delegates looked upon it as a left versus right wing fight and voted accordingly. Those who voted for it looked upon it as a move to make the League the type of vanguard organization the left wing desired and to strengthen the influence of the League in shaping the policies of the Socialist movement to the left. Those who voted against raising the age limit were skeptical about the vanguard plan and looked upon the idea of the League's influencing the political development of the movement as "using the League as a political football." This matter has also been put to a referendum after its adoption by a narrow majority.

What the political composition of the new NEC is, is difficult

to say. Just as in the party the definition of a left-winger is not very clear. It will be necessary to wait for a decisive issue, comparable to the question the last N E C was faced with on what support it should give the New York Yipsels in their fight with the Old Guard over the New Leader resolution, before getting an accurate picture of who's who. The opposition to the candidacy of Winston Dancis for re-election as National Secretary was based chiefly upon the position he took on the NEC during the above mentioned fight. The left wing succeeded in electing Ben Fischer by a majority of nine votes.

Despite all the shortcomings of the convention, the fine spirit of the delegates and their realization of the need of improving the structure of the League and their determination to concentrate on this work gives one

much to feel hopeful for. With the final desertion of basic Marxist fundamentals by the Communist International the need for a revolutionary youth organization grows. The Y.P.S.L. must become a banner bearer of Revolutionary Socialism penetrating every youth organization with its message and mobilizing youth against war and fascism and for mighty campaigns for the economic demands of young people. As such an organization it can stop the progress of the Young Communist League and dislodge it from positions it acquired during the years of socialist inactivity. It will be prepared to cope with the fascist gangs that will inevitably appear on the American scene and will play a leading role in fighting them. With the development of a mass influence it will lead the youth of the nation in opposition to the war plans of American Imperialism.

THE WORKERS' AMENDMENT AS AN IMMEDIATE DEMAND

By Albert Goldman

The decision of the Supreme Court holding the National Industrial Recovery Act unconstitutional and thus bringing to an end the various codes created a sufficiently deep stirring among the laboring masses to justify a campaign of explanation and a program for the purpose of mobilizing the workers to guard whatever they had won by virtue of some codes and to achieve further gains.

Reformist Versus Revolutionary Utilization of NRA Decision

Two lines of conduct were pos-

sible for a political party representing the working class to meet the situation arising out of the decision. The decision could be used as the spearhead of a campaign to give Congress the right which the Supreme Court said it did not possess. A working class party utilizing the decision for that purpose would in no way differentiate itself from any liberal group composed of people who conceived of the possibility of reforming capitalism and making the lot of the working class tolerable under that system. The demand to "liberalize" our constitution to permit

social legislation is not at all a demand peculiar to the working class. Conclusive evidence of that fact is furnished by Roosevelt's intimation that the constitution must be amended to permit the Federal government to legislate on those subjects covered by the N.R.A. It is a demand which all enlightened defenders of the present system support. The fact that all other capitalist countries have that power shows how little that power really means to the working class.

To follow the line of conduct indicated above would stamp a working class political party as hopelessly opportunistic.

Another method to follow for the purpose of utilizing the decision to educate the masses and gain support for the Socialist party is to show that the working class cannot and dare not trust a capitalist government to guard the interests of the working class and that it must rely on its own strength to achieve and retain the concessions wrested from the capitalist class. It was a glorious opportunity to bring home to the workers that what a capitalist government for one reason or another grants to them can be taken away very easily if reliance is placed in that government but that which the workers through their own struggles win for themselves and guard with their organized strength cannot be taken away so easily.

Could a six hour day or a minimum wage gained by organized struggle be declared unconstitutional? The simplest worker would understand the meaning of such a question.

It was the duty of a revolutionary party to point out that lesson to the workers and furthermore to call upon them to act on the basis of that lesson. It was necessary for the Socialist party to call upon the workers to organize and struggle and achieve by their struggle much more than that which Roosevelt had given them through the N R A as a sop.

The course which a party followed to meet the situation created by the Supreme Court decision determined whether that party was a socialist party or a liberal party, whether it was a revolutionary party or a reformist party.

Political Action Includes Organized Struggle

Should we then neglect the political aspect of the decision and urge the workers to confine their efforts merely to economic action? Should we cease all efforts to pass social legislation and concentrate on trade union activity? NOT AT ALL!

To urge the workers to rely upon their own organized strength does not mean to neglect political action. It simply means that even in questions of legislation the only real force to rely upon is the organized strength of the working class. To forget that the class struggle plays the dominant role not only in trade union activities but in all forms of working class activities is to forget the A B C of socialism. Assume that the Supreme Court has the power to declare laws favorable to the working class unconstitutional, it does not at all follow that the organized strug-

gle of the masses will have no effect upon the court. Assume that the Supreme Court has no such power, it does not follow that without any organized struggle any favorable legislation will be passed. Of all factors the organized struggle of the working class is far and away the most important single one determining whether any concessions will be obtained from the capitalist state.

But will it not be easier to achieve favorable legislation if we get the working class to struggle and at the same time grant congress the specific right to legislate on matters affecting the condition of workers in industry? Why not first clear the ground, so to speak, by passing the amendment giving congress that right and then wage a struggle for social legislation? A totally incorrect way of considering the whole matter.

We Must Favor the Amendment
but Only as Part of the
General Struggle

Let it be first of all understood that it would be absurd to carry on a campaign against such an amendment; no realistic revolutionary socialist would oppose the passing of such an amendment. The whole question revolves not on whether the Socialist party should favor the "workers'" amendment but on the correctness from a revolutionary point of view of bringing out this amendment as the center of a campaign to meet the situation resulting from the adverse decision with reference to the N R A.

Reading the socialist press, one would be justified in con-

cluding that the Socialist party is of the opinion and so informs the workers that the solution to all their immediate problems and the answer to the hostile attitude of the court is the Hillquit amendment. To be convinced of that it is not necessary to read the press published by the out-and-out reformists, the press typified by the New Leader and the Wisconsin Leader, but it is sufficient to read an editorial entitled "Judicial Hitlerism" in the Socialist Call, a weekly published by the militant group in the party. "There can only be one answer to this dictatorship of the judiciary," says this editorial. "It is: PASS THE HILLQUIT WORKERS' RIGHTS AMENDMENT!" (capitals in original). If the organ of the militants contains such sentiments it can be imagined what the reformist press contains.* (see note below)

THE INCORRECTNESS OF THE CAM-
PAIGN AROUND THE AMENDMENT CON-
SISTS NOT IN FAVORING THE AMEND-
MENT BUT IN MAKING IT APPEAR AS
THE ONLY THING NECESSARY TO SOLVE
THE PROBLEMS OF THE WORKING CLASS.

* In the issue of the Socialist Call of July 27, 1935, appearing subsequent to the writing of this article, an editorial appeared which went a long way to placing the Hillquit amendment in its proper perspective. That editorial clearly states that "revolutionary socialists have never believed that capitalism can be abolished by a series of reforms that will gradually transform the capitalist system into a socialist system."

What was necessary immediately after the N R A decision was to emphasize the necessity for organization and struggle for such immediate demands as the thirty hour week with an adequate minimum wage, unemployment insurance and the prevailing wage rate for the unemployed on work relief. And as part of the struggle for these demands it would be necessary and correct to put forth the constitutional amendment. It is simply a question of emphasis which makes one campaign revolutionary and correct and the other reformist and incorrect.

Foolish indeed would we appear before the working class were we to take the definite attitude that first we must have the constitution amended and after that we shall propose such demands as indicated above. And while nowhere in the Socialist press does this idea clearly appear, the nature of the whole campaign would tend to give that impression to those workers who read our press.

Necessary to Destroy Not to Create Illusions

Nor is the question of creating reformist illusions in the minds of the workers an unimportant one. Goodness knows they have too many such illusions as it is and the function of our party is not to add to them but to attempt to destroy them. When an immediate demand is put forth we must take into consideration the possibility of rallying the working masses for a struggle against the capitalist class and its state around that demand; we must also take into consideration the consciousness of the masses and the possibility of intensifying their class consciousness.

It is not always easy to judge exactly what kind of immediate demand will best serve the purpose of mobilizing the workers and in the struggle also destroying their illusions. One of the tests of a revolutionary Marxist is to formulate such demands and not to hesitate to change them if they are not in harmony with the consciousness of the workers at a particular time and if instead of destroying they create illusions.

Revolutionary socialists differentiate themselves from the reformists in their conception of the state and the road to power. It is interesting to note how enthusiastic the right-wing socialists are about the amendment. That amendment harmonizes so well with their whole conception of gradualism. First we'll change the constitution; then we shall introduce one good law after another; and one fine day the workers will wake up pleasantly surprised to find themselves in the midst of a socialist world.

The fact that the reformists also support a certain demand does not of course make it obligatory for the revolutionists to reject such a demand. As a matter of fact, it is the method in which agitation for a demand is carried out that distinguishes a revolutionary Marxist from a gradualist and not the demand itself necessarily. The reformist wants to achieve an immediate demand without struggle and as one of the necessary steps to achieve socialism without struggle. The revolutionary Marxist wants to achieve the demand through struggle, to mobilize and educate the workers in the struggle as a step towards the final struggle for

power.

We take it for granted that socialism cannot be introduced by a change of the constitution and the enactment of one law after another. We take it for granted that the state is an instrument to serve and protect the interests of the capitalist class and it is pure utopianism to expect that the working class can use that instrument for the ushering in of a socialist world. It is the class struggle in its most tense form that will decide what class will have power and whether a socialist world will be created. The European capitalist countries have no Supreme Court which can nullify parliamentary legislation and the working classes of those countries will have no easier time to gain power and build socialism than the working class of this country.

Consequently in putting forth a demand such as an amendment to the constitution exceedingly great care must be exercised not to give the workers the idea that socialism can be ushered in constitutionally. Again it must be repeated that it would be exceedingly mechanical to conclude, because of our conception of the nature of the state and the road to power, that we should be hostile or even indifferent to a constitutional amendment. Socialists have and must always interest themselves in the nature of the capitalist state. They must fight to have it democratized even from the point of view of capitalist democracy. But in that struggle we must be constantly teaching the workers

that not capitalist democracy and not the capitalist state will bring us socialism but workers' democracy and the workers' state.

Not a Workers' Amendment

It must be made clear in our general agitation in support of the amendment that we do not consider it as the cure-all for the ills of the working class. From that point of view it is a grievous mistake to call the amendment the "Workers'" amendment. There is nothing about the amendment which contains the special philosophy of the working class. Other sections of the population the liberals in general, will undoubtedly favor some such amendment. There is no threat in this amendment to the capitalist order; there is nothing in it which will be of peculiar benefit to the working class. All it does is to grant congress the authority to pass whatever laws it deems fit dealing with the matters enumerated in the amendment. This is not sufficient to justify calling it the "workers'" amendment.

A real "workers'" amendment would be one that specifically provides for the socialization of industry and a prohibition of exploitation. That kind of an "amendment" will not come as a result of amending the constitution but of formulating a new constitution after the workers achieve power. All other "amendments" will not help and in supporting them we must not create more and greater illusions.

before we were financially prepared we decided to print the APPEAL instead of mimeographing it. We did this because the difficulties of mimeographing threatened the very existence of the APPEAL as an effective organ of revolutionary socialism.

It can now be stated with a great deal of assurance that the SOCIALIST APPEAL will become the center around which will rally all the revolutionary forces within the Socialist party. Its uncompromising attitude on all questions of socialist principle, its devotion to revolutionary Marxism against both reformism and Stalinism have attracted to it the best elements within our party.

The SOCIALIST APPEAL has been endorsed by the steering committee of the Socialist Call Institute held at Boundbrook, New Jersey. This of course practically makes it the official inner-party organ of the whole left wing movement.

What in general is the purpose of the APPEAL?

- 1 To serve partly as a bulletin for the left wing of the Socialist party.
- 2 To furnish a medium for the discussion of differences of opinion between revolutionary socialists.
- 3 To educate the party membership in the principles of revolutionary Marxism.

But of course there is the inevitable rub! The terribly distasteful but so deucedly necessary matter of finances. Thus far the burden has rested on few, very few comrades. They will be unable to stand the strain much longer.

We are exceedingly modest in our requests:
SUBSCRIBE FOR TWELVE ISSUES FOR FIFTY CENTS
OR FOR SIX ISSUES FOR TWENTY-FIVE CENTS
If you are able, willing and ready, send in an additional half-dollar so that we can send copies to unemployed members and cover costs.

Send your subscription and donation to:
RUDOLPH C. OLSON care SOCIALIST APPEAL
4219 Lincoln Avenue Chicago, Illinois

